

what's up?

What's it all about?

Drug and alcohol use can negatively impact many areas of a teen's life. How much and how often a teen drinks determines whether there are any negative effects and how severe they are. Teens who use alcohol or drugs heavily often have other risk factors such as family problems or a history of physical or sexual abuse.

What are the details?

According to the 2002 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey:

- Alcohol is the most commonly used substance among students. Alcohol use and experimentation increase with grade level. About half of 8th graders say they had ever taken more than a sip of alcohol, compared with nearly 75% of 12th graders.
- About 10% of 8th graders, 20% of 10th graders and 30% of 12th graders report binge drinking, consuming 5 or more drinks in a row, at least once in the past two weeks.
- About one third of 10th graders and nearly half of 12th graders say that alcohol is easy to get.
- Marijuana use increases as students get older. For instance, about 3% of 6th graders report ever using marijuana compared to almost half of 12th graders. About 1% of 6th graders report that they used marijuana in the past month, compared with nearly a quarter of 12th graders.
- About 2% to 3% of teens in grades 8, 10 and 12 say they used methamphetamines in the past month.
- While Washington teens are less likely to use cocaine than youth nationwide, over 8% of 12th graders say they had tried cocaine.

Why does it matter?

The link to teen deaths

Alcohol is involved in about 35% of driver fatalities and about 40% of drownings of 15- to 20-year-olds. About 1-in-4 10th and 12th graders report riding in a vehicle within the past month, driven by someone who had been drinking.

The link to poor health

Heavy drinking and use of marijuana or other drugs have negative consequences, including difficulty learning, remembering and problem solving, and serious chronic problems such as high blood pressure, cancer of the mouth, and liver disease. Substance abuse can cause depression, sexual problems, seizures, and even death.

The link to sexual activity and teen pregnancy

Nationally, about a quarter of teens report using alcohol or drugs during their most recent sexual encounter. Among 15- to 17-year-olds, about half are concerned that they might go farther sexually because they were drinking or using drugs. Teens who have used marijuana are 4 times more likely to have been pregnant or to have gotten someone pregnant than teens who have never smoked pot.

The link to dependency

Early users are more likely to take other drugs later. About 40% of those who start drinking at age 14 years or under develop alcohol dependence compared to 10% of those who start drinking at age 21 years or older.

The link to school performance

In Washington, students who regularly use alcohol or other drugs are 3 to 5 times more likely to skip school than students who don't use drugs. Marijuana smokers get lower grades and are less likely to graduate from high school than their non-smoking peers.

The link to violence

In Washington, more than 1-in-4 8th graders who report drinking in the past month also report carrying a weapon, compared to 1-in-20 who did not drink. Students in grades 8, 10 and 12 who report recent alcohol use are more than twice as likely to have been in a physical fight in the past year than those who don't drink.

What can I do?

Talking to teens about drugs can be uncomfortable for adults. But if you don't talk to them about it, someone else will. Teens will be told many inaccurate things about drugs such as "everybody is doing it" or "it can't hurt you." Here are some tips adapted from the Partnership for a Drug-Free America and the Drug Skills Prevention Center:

- Communicate. Listen carefully, and discuss any problems they (or their friends) are having with drugs and alcohol.
- Involve yourself. Participate in church, school and parent groups. Communicate with the parents of your teen's friends. Know where your teens are and who they are with.
- Be a good role model. Send teens a message that you can celebrate and have fun without drinking, by doing it yourself.
- Be careful of the messages you send. Refrain from statements such as "I had a terrible day—I need a drink."
- Love your children unconditionally. Let teens know you value them, even in times of trouble.
- Devote time. Help with homework, reading, sports or just talking.
- Encourage and help build your teen's self esteem. Help teens to act independently and resist peer pressure. Encourage them to fulfill their hopes, dreams and goals.
- Teach and practice refusal skills. Role-play how to say no and remind kids what your values are about alcohol and drug use.
- Provide consistent and accurate information about specific drugs.
- Establish clear family rules on drugs. Teach and expect children to follow your rules. Consistently enforce the rules you set.

Can we protect teens?

Taking these steps can protect teens from misusing alcohol and other drugs:

- Provide lots of love, support and encouragement.
- Establish and enforce rules against underage drinking and other drug use.
- Set a good example. Limit your own use of alcohol, and don't drink and drive. Ask other parents to do the same.
- Discuss alcohol and tobacco advertising and marketing with youth.
- Talk to kids about your expectations regarding the use of alcohol and other drugs.
- Get involved in your child's education.
- Support public policy changes that are likely to make your community a safer and healthier environment.

**hot
links!**

Washington State Department of Health
DOH Pub 910-120 11/2003
www.doh.wa.gov

Resources listed here are provided as a public service and do not imply endorsement by the State of Washington.

References for source materials are available from the Child and Adolescent Health program, 360-236-3547.

For persons with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. Please call 1-800-525-0127.

Al-Anon and Alateen 1-888-4AI-ANON (1-888-425-2666); www.al-anon.org

Partnership for a Drug-Free America www.drugfreeamerica.org/parents.html

KidsHealth www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/kids_and_alcohol.html
"A Parent's Guide to Kids and Alcohol"

National Institutes of Health www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/alcoholandyouth.html
Alcohol and youth resources

National Institute on Drug Abuse www.nida.nih.gov/Infofax/Infofaxindex.html
Science-based facts on drug abuse and addiction

Washington State Alcohol/Drug Clearinghouse 206-725-9696 or 1-800-662-9111;
<http://clearinghouse.adhl.org/>

Washington State Healthy Youth Survey 2002 www3.doh.wa.gov/HYS/

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry www.aacap.org

Go to Facts for Families, "Substance Abuse Treatment for Children and Adolescents" (Fact Sheet #41)



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